

Martin Horst House
407 Conti Street
Mobile
Mobile County
Alabama

HABS No. ALA-776

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,
112-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ALA-776

MARTIN HORST HOUSE

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Location: 407 Conti Street, southeast corner of Conti and
Hamilton Streets, Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.
Geographic Location Code: 01-2100-097

Present Owner: Carl K. Brady

Present Occupant: Vacant; presently being restored for use as a
dwelling.

Statement of
Significance: This is a fine example of the imposing residences
built in Mobile after the Civil War. The building
exists in a complete state, with the decorative
features, such as the cast-iron veranda and fence,
intact.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1867-68
2. Architect: Unknown. Builder: George W. Cox
3. Original and subsequent owners: There were originally
two two-story frame houses on this corner lot where Martin
Horst constructed the existing building. The following
chain of title was extracted from the deed books in the
Probate Court Record Division, Mobile County.

1866 Deed April 9, 1866 recorded April 13, 1866 in
Book 20 page 261
Henrietta Dolhinde

to
Martin Horst

For a consideration of \$4,000: "That certain tract,
piece, parcel or lot of land and premises situated
lying and being in the City and County of Mobile..."

1923 Deed December 7, 1923 in Book 200 page 218
Heirs of Martin Horst

to
Isabel Zoghby

The property was purchased in 1963 from the Zoghby heirs by Albert Schock and sold for \$72,000 to the Mobile Historic Development Commission in 1965 in an effort to save the house from demolition. The Commission sold the property in 1971 to Carl K. Brady, who agreed to restore and maintain it.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Martin Horst, who immigrated to the United States about 1838, was born in Oberohmen, Hesse-Darmstadt on May 4, 1830. Having settled in Mobile, he married Apollonia Weinschenk in 1854 and was an important commission merchant. In 1871, he was mayor of Mobile and is credited with breaking the "Carpetbag" rule. He died October 7, 1878. (Information supplied by Martin Horst IV.)

George Woodward Cox, the builder of the Horst house, was born in London in 1814 and died in Mobile in 1869. An orphan, he was sent in 1828 by two sisters in England to live with his half-brother, William Cox, who had settled in Mobile and was a builder and contractor. George Cox became an apprentice to his half-brother, but the latter died in October, 1832. Nonetheless, the young man prospered; at the age of twenty-one, he was a successful bidder on important work at the United States Arsenal at Mount Vernon, near Mobile. In addition to the Martin Horst house, George Cox built a residence for George Rapelje in 1863 (1005 Government Street, owned for many years by Dr. O.F. Cawthorn). (This information was supplied by Edmund L. Deasy, the maternal grandson of George W. Cox.)

C. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Lewis Troost Map (c. 1840), City Hall, Mobile

Mobile Deed Books, Probate Court Record Division,
Mobile County

Letter from Mr. Edmund L. Deasy to Mrs. Nancy H. Holmes,
dated January 19, 1967; in the files of the Mobile
Historic Development Commission.

Interview with Mr. Martin Horst IV, August, 1966.

Historic Buildings Inventory, Mobile City Planning
Commission Office, City Hall, Mobile

Nineteenth-Century Mobile Architecture, An Inventory of
Existing Buildings, Mobile City Planning Commission
(Unpublished manuscript, to be published in 1972)

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2. Secondary and published sources:

Bird's Eye View of the City of Mobile, Alabama, 1873,
Cincinnati, Ehrgotte T. Kreba, 1873

Craighead, Erwin, Mobile: Fact and Tradition, Mobile:
Powers Printing Co., 1930.

D. Supplemental Material

The following is a tranacription of a letter written by Martin Horst to his brother, Charles, in 1868, and is in the papers of Martin Horst IV, 907 Government Street, Mobile, Alabama.

Mobile Jan. 12th 1868

My dear Brother, Charles!
Metropolis, Ill.

Your kind favor is recd. and feel very sorry that I canot comply with your request at this moment for the following reasons, to wit:-Iam just now finishing up my new dwelling I have been building wich cost me twenty Six Thousand dolls. Seven Thousand more than I calculated on, and when I began last Spring I only had twelve Thousand Cash hoping at that time to collect by Jan. 1st at least 6 or 7 thousand dolls. that I could draw out of my business but so far I have not been able to collect one dolls. of this money and probable never will; as most people who owe any money are taking the benefit of the Bankrupt Law and than them is a very poor showing. At present I am paying one or two per. pr. month for money I had to borrow as I could not colect what is due me four & five months ago. People are very indifferent about it wheter they pay you or not, the only Satisfaction they give you is; wait until I have some money then I will pay you. This are trying times down here. No money and no Business and none in Prospect. Had I known Six months ago that such time was in Store for us I would have kept my twelve Thousand dolls. in hand and could buy this day a house for it equally as good as the one I have build for 26.000. Nobody knew things would come to such a pass. Houses do not bring the value of the Bricks this day, not one half of what they cost to build in 1860 or even two years ago. Such is the State of affaira all over the

Southern States; and will remain so as long as radical 49-Mob
Thiefes rule this once happy Country. Knowing you have a 112-
chance to establish yourself and get in to Business it
grieves me more so not being able to assist you even with
the amount of \$400. had I my twelve Th. yet in hand I would
go in with you and run a Mill Ourselves but as it is
I cannot even assist you in your undertaking. I am in hopes
you will succede and find it among your friends up there,
so as not to loose the chance of a partnership.--

My family are all well. Last Aug. I loat my little
Boy Fredy five months old and have but four Children
now three boyes and the youngest a little girl 2½ years
old. All in good health and spirit.

Hoping you will not think hard of me under the above
circumstances for not assisting you I remain

your devoted Brother

M. Horst

Prepared by Charles A. Herrington
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
July 12, 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The general character of this residence is very typical of the more imposing domestic architecture of mid-nineteenth-century Mobile, consisting of a symmetrical main block with an offset service wing extending at one side to the rear. The cast-iron window cornices and sills and the large bracketed wooden cornice make this house of special interest and give it an Italianate flavor.
2. Condition of fabric: The main section is in good condition generally, but the two-story wooden gallery in the rear was in a very deteriorated condition before restoration in 1971-72.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Both the main section and service wing are two stories and form an irregular "L" measuring 62'-8" x 92'-0". The front elevation consists of five bays, and the side, excluding the service wing, of four.

2. Foundations: Both the exterior brick walls and the interior bearing walls of the main section have continuous brick foundation walls, pierced with cast-iron vents. There is a 17'-9" x 27'-10" wine cellar under the service wing, the west wall being the foundation wall of the wing, and the remaining masonry walls being independent.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Exterior walls are 1'-2" brick exposed and unpainted, except the masonry of the first floor of the service gallery and the south wall of the service wing, which are stuccoed.
4. Structural system: Ordinary wooden framing is used for floors, roofs, and interior partitions.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: On the north front there is a one-story cast-iron veranda with deck and railing. The floor of the veranda is covered with octagonal tiles and is faced on the front edge with white marble banding. The front steps are solid white marble blocks. In the "L" formed by the main section and service wing, is a two-story wooden gallery with wooden posts and railings, and louvered shutters in some bays. The balustrade of the east end only of the gallery has turned balusters. There is a bulkhead over the steps leading to the wine cellar in front of the east wall of the service wing.
6. Chimneys: There are two stuccoed brick chimneys on each side (east and west) of the main section. On the service wing, there is one large stuccoed brick chimney on the west wall, a small one on the south wall, and another small chimney near the south end. The latter two are for flues without fireplaces.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance doorway on the north front is arched and framed with an alternating pattern of projecting brick headers, above which is a cast-iron moulded and denticulated cornice. The double doors consist of two panels each, a round-headed rectangle over a square. The arched opening above these wooden doors is filled with a two-light transom. The reveal in the masonry wall is wooden panelling. The sill block is white marble. Other exterior doors on the rear gallery are wooden with four panels, have glazed rectangular transoms and no exterior wooden trim.

- b. Windows and shutters: The floor-length windows of the main section are double-hung wooden sash with two-over-three lights, the lower sash consisting of two vertical rectangle panes over one that is horizontal. Other windows are double-hung wooden sash with two-over-two lights and a wooden panel below. This panel is divided and hinged in the southeast window of the rear parlor to permit access to what was the rear gallery. The upper sash of all the windows in the main section is slightly arched. In the service wing, all windows are double-hung wooden sash with six-over-six lights. The windows of the main section have slightly arched cast-iron cornices crowned in the center by anthemion acroteria, and cast-iron bracketed sills. In addition, the end windows on the north front, both floors, contain cast-iron railings. All windows have adjustable wooden louvered shutters with "Z"-shaped hinges on pintles.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: On the main section, there is a hipped roof originally covered with slate shingles (which are stacked in the cellar), but now covered by composition roll roofing. The service wing has a gable roof with the same covering.
- b. Cornice, eaves: An overhanging wooden cornice with panelled soffits is supported on wooden scroll brackets with pendants. The frieze is exposed brick with a stepped double string course separating it from the wall surface. Above the cornice is a low stuccoed brick parapet with inset panels and a narrow moulded cap.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor of the main section has a central hall flanked on the right by two equal rooms and on the left by a double parlor, divided in the center by a bracketed arch. There is a small entry vestibule with double doors. On the second floor, there are two equal rooms on each side of the central hall with closets between them. The front (north) end of the hall is enclosed to form a small room. Doors at the rear (south) of the hall of both floors lead to the rear gallery. The service wing consists of two rooms separated by a stairhall on the first story, the larger room on the north connecting by a door to the main section. On the second floor, there are four rooms

in a line, interconnected, except for a small room on the north which connects with the interior of the main section. All rooms on both floors open to the rear gallery.

2. Stairways: There are two interior stairways: in the main hall on the right, a single flight curves to a right angle at the top, and in the service wing, there is a double flight with a single landing enclosed between two rooms.
3. Flooring: In the entrance hall, there is a tile floor matching that of the front veranda. All other floors are random width pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are papered over plaster with the following exceptions: in the southwest room of the first floor, there is panelled wainscoting and in the adjacent service wing room, there is V-joint wainscoting; the ceilings of the second-floor rooms of the main section are beaded tongue-and-groove boards.
5. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are wooden with four panels. Transoms in the main house are fixed panels(wooden) downstairs, and pivoted glazed panels upstairs. Doorways on the first floor have eared architrave trim with batters; on the second floor, the doorways have plain architrave trim.
6. Special decorative features, trim: The rooms of the first floor have an elaborate foliated frieze and cove moulding executed in plaster, and a carved wooden picture moulding at the height of the door and window heads. Intricate acanthus leaf plaster medallions adorn the ceilings of all first-floor rooms, including the entrance hall. An arch between the parlors consist of simple mouldings with acanthus leaves at the top edge, springs from foliated plaster brackets, and has a panelled soffit. The two faces of the arch keystone are decorated with male profile busts in relief, reputedly those of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. The eared architrave mouldings of the windows match those of the doorways, and there is a 9" baseboard. Also in the double-parlor are elaborate carved wooden pier mirrors and arched window cornices. These are probably later additions, although they resemble the cast-iron cornices of the exterior. The white marble fireplace mantles of the first floor are relatively plain.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Four brick fireplaces on the first floor have shallow cast-iron grates and white marble mantles. On

the second floor, the four brick fireplaces have shallow cast-iron grates surrounded by smooth plaster and plain wooden mantles. In the service wing, in addition to flues for stoves, there is a large brick fireplace with cast-iron grate, plaster face, and wooden mantle in the large room on the first floor adjacent to the main section.

b. Lighting: Fixtures are electric and of no distinction.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is located on the southeast corner of Conti and Hamilton Streets, facing north on Conti Street. Located in what is now the Church Street East Historic District, the location was once a very fashionable residential area, but is now mainly commercial and run down.
2. Landscaping: The front and side property lines are defined by an ornamental cast-iron fence set on a stuccoed base curbing. The ground level is brought up to the top of the curbing, and there are several large magnolia and pecan trees in the yard to the east, as well as shrubs. There is no evidence of a formal garden, as in other similar properties.
3. Outbuildings: There is a two-story stuccoed brick carriage house at the intersecting of the 8' brick wall defining the east and south property lines.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervising Architect
National Park Service
July 5, 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a cooperative project during the summer of 1966 between the Historic American Buildings Survey and various agencies, organizations, and individuals of the City of Mobile. The Historic American Buildings Survey supplied the project supervisor, Woodrow W. Wilkins, and three draughtsmen, Carl J. Roaenbug (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Michael R. Foll (Auburn University), and Lowell K. West (University of Kentucky). One draughtsman, Elbert L. Coleman (Alabama A & M), was provided by the Mobile Housing Board, which agency administers urban renewal. The services of an additional draughtsman, James Eley, specifically designated as an architectural student from Auburn University, was made possible by contributions from numerous local architects and

businessmen. The Historic Mobile Preservation Society, in agreement with the History Department of Springhill College, provided a student historian, Linda Carroll. Office space was supplied by the City of Mobile through the City Planning Commission. Roy Thigpen, a local photographer, was contracted to supply the photographs. All local arrangements were made by the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Mrs. Nancy N. Holmes, President. The project was edited during the summer of 1972 by Charles A. Herrington, Architectural Historian, in a cooperative effort between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Mobile Historic Development Commission.